

GRACE GIVING

A Devotional Prayer Guide on the Subject of Financial Stewardship

Prayer Time #4

Focal Passage: 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. ²On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

My good friend Brother Karl Barnfield made a very astute observation about mission opportunities in the local church. He said a church could take all the money it had available to give in pennies, and a church could find enough worthy causes that each could receive a penny each. That same statement can be made for every Christian individual. We could take the money we set aside to give to the Lord, and divide it by pennies to a multitude of worthy causes. What should the Christian do with their giving? How should they direct it? This is an important principle about grace giving: the first priority of our giving to the Lord should be to the local church where one regularly attends.

The pattern in Old and New Testaments is clear. God's people were to bring their offerings to the House of the Lord. In the Old Testament, this is referred to as the store house principle. Malachi 3:10 says,

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.”

In an earlier devotional reading, we learned that everything belongs to the Lord (Psalm 50:10). The Lord did not command the people to bring their contributions to the Temple because He was lacking. He graciously gave people this command so they would trust Him. By their contributions, they were helping maintain the worship God graciously gave them an opportunity to have. The Lord set apart the priests and Levites to minister before the Lord. The contributions of the people ensured those men would have their needs supplied, and their focus could remain upon teaching the Law and performing their sacrificial duties.

In our focal passage today in 1 Corinthians 16, Paul reminded the church of the “store house” principle in a New Testament manner. The people were taught to bring their regular offerings to the local church, where it would then be distributed for the furtherance of the work of the Lord. They were set aside their offerings. It was collected. It was maintained with principles of accounting. This may not sound spiritual, but I assure you, it was very spiritual. The principle of the New Testament bears this out.

Within the New Testament epistles, there are a number of examples of how the funds brought to the local church were to be disseminated under the oversight of the church. Widows were cared for. Needy people were fed. Those who labored in Word and doctrine (pastors) were considered worthy of their hire and the church was taught to “not muzzle the ox as it treads out the grain.” Local churches are God's ordained store houses. You can give to many worthy causes, but the first priority of our giving should be to the local church.

Why is that so? The local church is the place where we learn from God's Word. It is a place where we are functioning together as a Body of Believers. It is a place where God's people have voluntarily covenanted together before the Lord. The local church is the expression of Christ and a visible bride. The local church has been given the Great Commission. Our giving to the local church establishes the ministry of the Word in a local community, and is the launching point for world evangelization.

As you pray today, consider this store house principle, and reflect on the truths we have learned in

earlier Grace Giving Devotionals. It is a privilege to give, and it all belongs to the Lord. We are to purpose in our hearts what we are to give. And our first place and priority of giving is the local church. I want to say a hearty thank you to the people of this church for your generosity toward myself. You have very much provided “for the ox” as you have supplied very abundantly for your pastor. I know how blessed I am of the Lord to have your great concern for me be proven for over 23 years!

There is much more to local church giving than supply for your preaching pastor. Store house giving provides for our other staff members who bless us with their commitment to the church. And your giving supplies for the ongoing ministry of the church. And let’s not fail to remember that we are to give generously to our local church in keeping with our calling as a church on mission. A good percentage of your local church contributions are used to take the Gospel around the world. Thank you for reading.

Suggestions for your prayer time:

- Thank the Lord for you’re the local church where you attend.
- Rejoice in the opportunities you’ve been given to be blessed under the ministry of local churches.
- Pray for the leaders of the church with regard to their making sound decisions regarding the church’s finances.
- Ask the Lord to provide the church with an abundance so the church can have a strong commitment to local and world evangelism.
- Pray about how the Lord might open doors of opportunity for the church to be generous in meeting needs locally.
- Ask the Lord to bless you with the finances to be able to set apart from your income so you can give regularly.